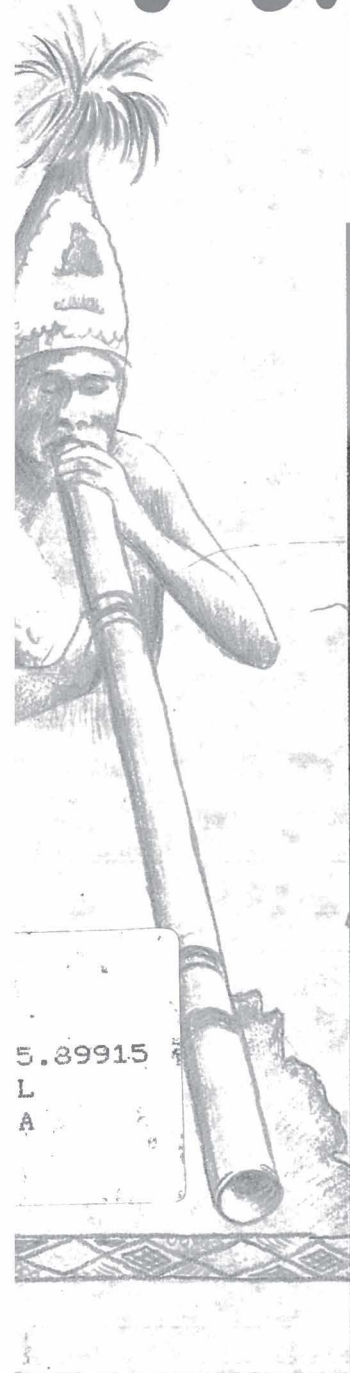


Threatened Cultures

Australian Aborigines



AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

Dr Richard Nile

Wayland

Titles in the series

Australian Aborigines
Bedouin
Inuit
Kurds
Maori
Native Americans
Rainforest Amerindians
Saami of Lapland
San of the Kalahari
Tibetans

Series editor: Paul Mason

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1 Introduction

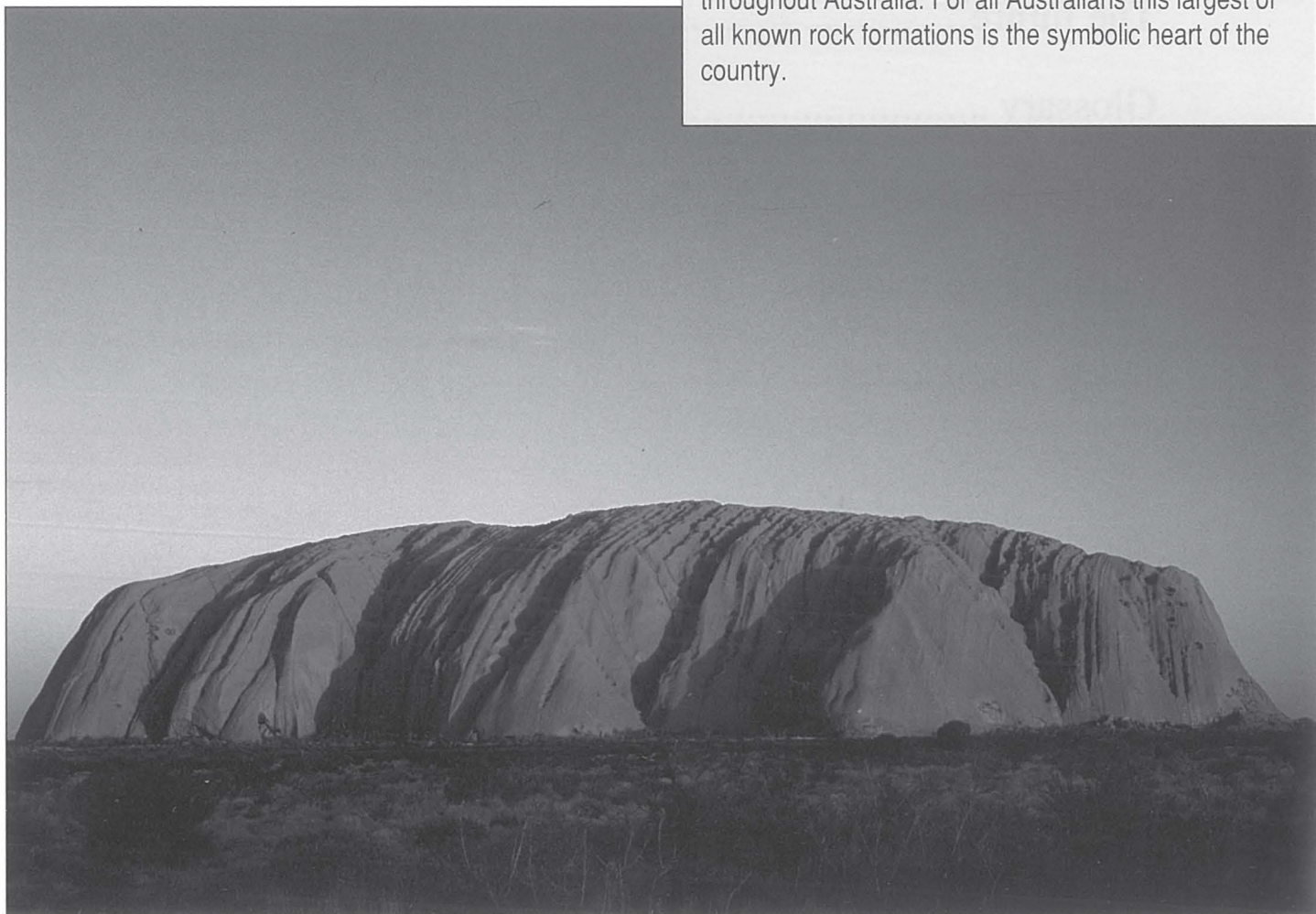
Australia is an ancient land. It is so old that once-giant mountains have been turned into small undulating hills by the weather. There were once great and lush forests in the interior; they have withered into deserts. The land is so old it is about as old as time itself. It may be the oldest land on earth.

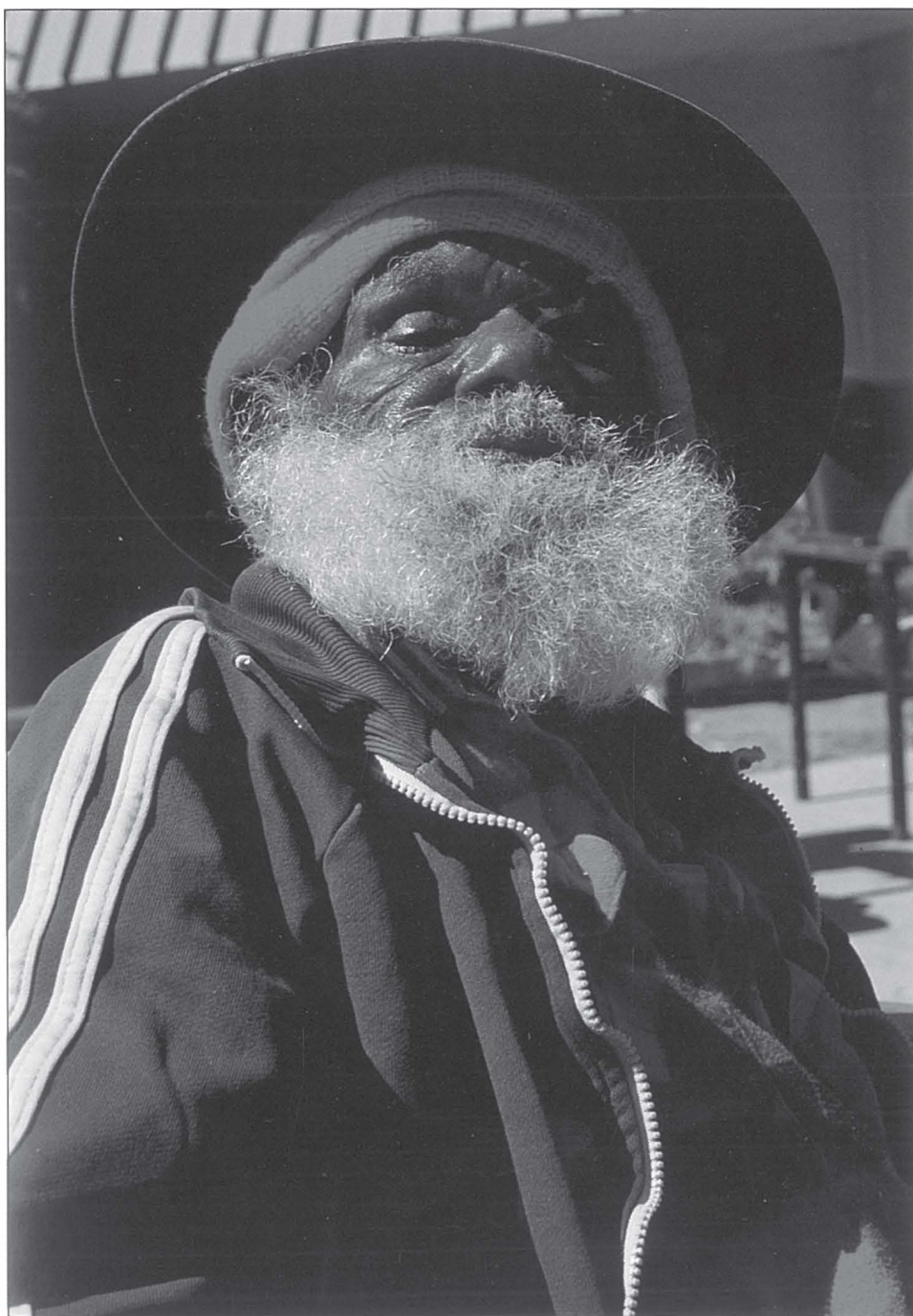
Australia was probably once connected to South America, but the continents separated as the earth's plates moved. According to this theory the land mass that we now know as Australia drifted into what became the Indian and Pacific oceans. It is thought that the marsupials we now

identify with Australia, such as kangaroos and wallabies, were once animals that lived in trees, like the marsupials of South America. As the continents separated, and Australia dried out and the centre became a treeless desert, so the tree creatures learnt to live on the ground.

Nobody knows for certain how or when the

Uluru is one of the best known of Australia's many natural landmarks and it is seen many Australian postcards and travel brochures. *Uluru* is also a place of tremendous cultural and spiritual significance for the *Aranda* peoples and other Aboriginal groups throughout Australia. For all Australians this largest of all known rock formations is the symbolic heart of the country.





◀ *This old man is one of the Pitjanjara people of central Australia. He is dressed in Western clothing but he knows many of the local Aboriginal languages and secrets.*

Aborigines arrived in Australia. Nor does anybody know for certain where they came from. Perhaps they were always there.

At one time Australia may also have been connected to Asia by a giant land bridge. The Aborigines could have travelled down it from further to the north – possibly from the sub-continent of India. As ice ages came and went the land bridge dissolved into the ocean and those who had travelled down it would have

been cut off from the rest of the world. Nobody knows for certain whether this is how it happened or not, but the oldest Aboriginal remains dated by modern scientists put the Aborigines at more than 60,000 years old. They have been in Australia for a very, very long time.

Many Aborigines do not agree that their ancestors were ever immigrants to Australia. Their own history tells them that they have lived there ever since Australia existed.